

CHAPTER XII

THE MURDERS OF CRISPUS AND FAUSTA

WE saw in the last chapter how Constantine presided over the deliberations of the bishops at Nicaea, mild, benignant, gracious, and condescending. It is a very different being whom we see at Rome in 326, suspicious, morose, and striking down in blind fury his own gallant son. The contrast is startling, the cause obscure and mysterious, but if the secret is to be discovered at all, it is probably to be found in the jealousies which raged in the Imperial House.

We must look a little closer at the family of Constantine. The Emperor himself was in the very prime of middle age, just turning his fiftieth year. His eldest son, by his first marriage with Minervina, was the hope of the Empire. Crispus, as we have seen, had won distinction on the Rhine, and had just given signal proof of his capacity by his victories over the navy of Licinius in the Hellespont, which had facilitated the capture of Byzantium. He was immensely popular, and the Empire looked to him, as it had looked to Tiberius and Drusus three centuries before, as to a strong pillar of the Imperial throne.